

All about brushing & flossing

Whiter teeth, fresher breath, fewer cavities. Who could ask for more from toothpaste? Some dental products make additional claims. Here's a short guide to ingredients and product claims to help you decide which toothpaste is best for your teeth.

(Note: Choose products with the American Dental Association (ADA) Seal of Acceptance on the labels, including for "natural" toothpastes. For more information on the ADA Seal of Acceptance and brand name products that have this seal, visit ada.org.)



Fluoride. To help prevent cavities, children and adults should use a toothpaste that contains fluoride. (Note: Many dentists prescribe fluoride supplements for people whose household drinking water contains little or no fluoride. If your drinking water is low in fluoride, ask your dentist about this option.)

Whitening toothpastes. These remove stains on the surface of the teeth with gentle polishing and/or hydrogen peroxide. Choose an ADA-approved whitening toothpaste for best and safe results. Consult your dentist about using over-the-counter, teeth-whitening products.

Desensitizing toothpaste.

Some toothpastes are specially formulated for people whose teeth are sensitive to touch or temperature changes.

Anti-plaque and tartar control toothpastes.

Plaque clings to the surface of your teeth. Unless plaque is removed every 24 to 36 hours, it can turn into a cement-like substance called tartar. And tartar destroys your gums. Plaque- and tartar-control formula toothpastes, used along with flossing and regular dental visits, can help to prevent plaque buildup. Using mouthwash can help, too.

DON'T FORGET TO FLOSS

Dental floss removes bacteria and plaque from between your teeth and gum line areas your toothbrush can't reach. It also removes particles of food lodged between your teeth. Floss carefully at least once a day to help keep plaque from building up. If plaque hardens into cement-like deposits called tartar, your teeth can start to decay or wobble due to loss of bone. Here's how to floss:

1. Cut a piece of floss about one-and-a-half feet long. Wrap the ends of the floss about your middle fingers.
2. Hold the floss tightly between your thumb and index finger, exposing about one inch of floss. Gently guide the floss between your teeth.
3. When the floss is at the gum line, curve it into a C shape against one tooth and gently scrape the side of the tooth with the floss. Repeat on each of your teeth, using a fresh section of floss for each tooth.
4. After you've flossed, rinse your mouth with water or mouthwash to remove remaining debris. Your gums may be tender and bleed for the first week. That's normal. But if the bleeding continues, see your dentist.

To help you remember to floss daily, without fail, floss after you brush your teeth.

